

Michaud Opposes Bill That Shortchanges Maine's Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Needs

Wednesday, December 14 2005

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Michael H. Michaud today voted against H.R. 3010, the Fiscal Year 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations conference report, because it delivered painful cuts that will hurt people in Maine. The measure failed to pass the House of Representatives four weeks ago by a vote of 209-224 due to strong bipartisan opposition by moderates of both parties. The new conference report only makes modest funding changes from the earlier version of the bill.

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“The House of Representatives defeated this flawed bill weeks ago because it was a bad deal for our health care providers, schools, and workers,” Michaud said. “In fact, it was the first time in ten years that the House of Representatives defeated a conference report to an appropriations bill was defeated on the floor.”

“Today, the House leadership is using smoke and mirrors with this bill, simply shuffling around scarce funds to look like more funding has been appropriated, when, in fact, this measure even has less funding than the bill we defeated,” Michaud explained.

Like the version rejected by the House on November 17, the revised version still slashes health, education and jobs programs by \$1.6 billion below last year's level. In addition, House Leadership is reportedly planning to add a government-wide across-the-board cut of 1 percent to the Department of Defense Appropriations conference report – which will cut programs in this bill by an additional \$1.4 billion.

“The ‘new’ bill simply moves around a small amount money to make modest restorations in a few health programs by making deeper cuts elsewhere,” Michaud explained. “The

bill still dramatically shortchanges workers, students, families and communities. It's a bad deal."

The conference report falls short on education funding and reflects a failure to commit to the next generations of Americans. The funding level for schools to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is nowhere near the \$22.8 billion that Congress and the Administration promised when NCLB was enacted, and it is less than half the authorized level for Fiscal Year 2006. For the fourth consecutive year, the maximum Pell grant is stalled at \$4,050, even though education costs have risen 36 percent since 2001.

"The conference report also cuts funding for Trade Adjustment Assistance by \$90 million below the Fiscal Year 2005 level, despite the staggering number of American manufacturing jobs lost due to ever increasing foreign imports and shifts in production overseas, particularly China," Michaud said. "Maine knows in particular that these jobs losses are in most cases directly attributable to our nation's flawed trade policies."

"It is simply outrageous that the conference report is freezing LIHEAP funding, even though a 44 percent increase in natural gas prices and a 24 percent increase in home heating oil prices are expected this winter," Michaud said. "Too many low-income Mainers simply won't be able to afford escalating heating costs."

Although nearly 46 million Americans are without health insurance, there is no new funding for Community Health Centers. The bill also eliminates the Healthy Communities Access Program, a program targeted at meeting the needs of the uninsured.

"It is a shame that during the holiday season, Congress is passing an appropriations bill that is a big lump of coal," Michaud said. "This bill represents the wrong priorities for Maine and burdens us with too many unfunded mandates. Congress can do better. Congress should do better."

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